Planning Services

Alberta
EDUCATION

FINAL NARRATIVE REPORT
TRI-COUNTY EDUCATIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

Respectfully Submitted By
Sage Institute of Canada Inc.

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PLEASE NOTE

THE VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED
IN THIS REPORT ARE THOSE OF THE RESEARCHERS AND
NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

ABSTRACT

Sage Institute of Canada Inc., measured the priorities for improving education that are held by professional staff, the boards and the public in the Counties of Newell, Vulcan and Warner. Over eighteen hundred people participated in identifying issues, conditions and suggestions for improvement. They then assisted in validating the information and placing each item in a priority ranking.

The results were compiled for each of approximately ten groups in each county. While there were certain differences among the groups and within the counties, a number of common issues emerged.

Steering committees in each county developed sets of recommendations that address the priority concerns. A compilation of the three sets of recommendations was prepared. It indicates the common major issues that were determined in the three counties. Lastly, Sage Institute prepared recommendations from an external point of view.

The following four summary recommendations were prepared by Sage Institute. They reflect what emerged as the major recommendations of the project.

1. Assure that the actions taken in managing the educational enterprise at all levels focus upon the primary goal of meeting the educational needs of children

2. Determine alternative means of financing education in rural areas, especially where enrolments are low and declining

3. Enable boards to take appropriate action to keep viable school programs available to rural families. Doing this may require the organization of an agency to assume the responsibility to determine conditions under which small schools would remain in operation

4. Provide in-service instruction to boards and professional staff in the areas of leadership, management, and methods of instruction that emphasize student learning as the primary focus of schools

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of the Project

During the 1985 school year, the superintendents of the Counties of Warner, Vulcan and Newell suggested to their County Boards of Education that there may be some merit in conducting a study into the educational issues that each county was facing. The three boards agreed, appointed a tri-county steering committee, and met with a representative of Sage Institute in Lethbridge in early 1985.

Members of the initial Tri-County Steering Committee were:

Chairman - Pat Norton, County of Newell
Secretary- Anne Scheuerman, County of Vulcan
Vince Fabian, County of Newell
Bruce Decoux, Superintendent, County of Newell
Patricia Aitchison, County of Vulcan
Cliff Elle, Superintendent, County of Vulcan
Hovey Reese, County of Warner
Clayne Steed, County of Warner
Henry Schoorl, County of Warner
Sandra Nelson, County of Warner
John Waddell, Superintendent, County of Warner

Bernie Gommeringer, Cal Annis, Armin Earl and Bill Ramsay from Alberta Education participated on occasion in steering committee meetings.

In September 1985, the steering committee requested a proposal from Sage Institute. This proposal was used as the basis for a proposal from the three counties to Alberta Education which was presented in late 1985. By February 1986, a final proposal was presented containing certain modifications, approval in principal was received, and the first meeting of an expanded Tri-County Steering Committee was scheduled for February 17 in Lethbridge.

On February 15, 1986, the original steering committee met at the Lethbridge Lodge to give final approval to the project. The items of interest to each county, Alberta Education, and Sage Institute were satisfactorily

resolved. Alberta Education gave verbal approval to proceed with the project, and the county representatives indicated they were prepared to recommend final approval to their respective Boards of Education.

Within a few days, all three counties had approved the project and initial activities were scheduled.

On the evening of February 25, 1986, approximately 120 persons selected by the original steering committee met at Sven Ericksen's Restaurant in Lethbridge. The meeting agenda consisted of an outline of the history of the development of the project presented by Committee Chairman, Pat Norton. Bryant Stringham, President of Sage Institute of Canada Inc., then introduced the project by providing an outline of the procedures that would be followed in measuring the consensus of significant groups concerning urgent educational issues.

During the initial meeting, and with some modifications agreed to later on, it was agreed that the Mission Statement upon which the project would focus would be:

> TO PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS SO THAT THEY CAN DEVELOP THEIR INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALS AND BECOME CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

It was determined that a meeting of three steering committees each comprised of thirty persons would be held in each county just prior to information gathering activities in that county. Consequently, Sage attended a steering committee meeting in Vulcan on February 26; in Duchess, Newell County on March 10; and in Warner on March 26.

Information-gathering meetings and interviews were held in each county shortly following these meetings. The information was processed, results calculated, and the initial reports were presented in the counties on May 27, 28, and 29. A final meeting was held with the Tri-County Steering Committee in Lethbridge on June 23, 1986.

1.2 The Methodology of Sage Analysis

Sage Analysis is an adaptation and refinement of Fault Tree Analysis procedures developed by Dr. Kent G. Stephens, Chairman of the Board of Sage Institute International. Dr. Stephens was an original member of research teams at Bell Telephones and Boeing that did the developmental work on Fault Tree Analysis in the early sixties. He was involved in the two breakthrough projects at Boeing that initiated Fault Tree work worldwide. These projects determined the safety and reliability of mechanisms for the prevention of inadvertent launch of Minuteman missiles for the U.S. Air Force, and provided N.A.S.A. with assurance that the factors that caused the deaths of three astronauts in a test capsule at Cape Kennedy would not occur again. Both of these projects are in the public domain and are readily available. Fault Tree Analysis of engineering systems based upon this pioneer work is now common among a variety of specialized firms throughout the world.

The Boeing Company has engaged in considerable developmental work since the initial discovery of Fault Tree principles. Lockheed, T.R.W., Dupont and others have made many technical improvements, most of which are proprietary to the developers. Dr. Stephens, at a very early stage in development of the Fault Tree technology, felt that the initial work had significant limitations. The first trees, and indeed most of their successors, could only accommodate hard, objective, ratio and interval data. The most thorny problems, however, even in engineering applications, are seldom restricted to the engineering issues alone. In most cases there is a human component to engineering and safety problems that, according to many studies, accounts for seventy to ninety percent of the causes of those problems. Dr. Stephens debated with his colleagues about these issues and ultimately determined to pursue these interests at the University of Washington, Seattle. In 1972 his dissertation described his adaptation of Fault Tree Analysis, which he has referred to as Sage Analysis. This technique will accommodate not only engineering, machine-machine interface problems, but also the human-machine, and human-human interface questions as well. He was successful in adapting the fault tree technology to accommodate soft, subjective, nominal and ordinal data, using Bayesian estimates of probability. These techniques correctly measure the priorities of groups of knowledgeable people about criticality of issues, actions that should be taken and problems that must be avoided.

An understanding of the mathematical formulations involved can be secured by researching the engineering fault trees in any standard engineering text on the topic. The particular adaptations of each company using the technique are proprietary and are not available. The basic approach used by Dr. Stephens is described in his dissertation, a copy of which is available through ERIC.

Technical reviews of the statistical treatment of data have been completed by the following:

- Esso Resources retained the firm of David W.H. Ellis to evaluate the mathematical formulations used in Sage analysis. While results of his evaluation are proprietary to Esso, on the strength of this evaluation the Syncrude Consortium, of which Esso is a major partner, has completed seven projects using Sage analysis. Esso has undertaken one project in the past year.

- The U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs retained Dr. Robert Hemmes of the Stanford Research Institute to do a technical evaluation of Sage analysis. Following his review, the Bureau contracted with Sage Institute for a series of projects.

- The Medical Division of the U.S. Veterans' Hospital Administration had Sage analysis evaluated by Dr. Ken Lawrence, Dr. William Deutsch, and Dr. Vern Gomes. A number of Veterans' Administration Hospitals now use Sage Analysis on a regular basis as part of their accreditation process.

- The Nuclear Utilities Service Corporation (Pittsburg) under the direction of its President, Dr. Saul Levine, has evaluated Sage analysis and now is using it. Dr. Levine was formerly head of Fault Tree Analysis projects with the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Agency.

- In 1984-85 the U.S. Military evaluated Sage analysis and sanctioned its use in developmental and evaluative work where measuring consensus is deemed important. A copy of their evaluation is available from the steering committee.

2.0 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

2.1 Objective 1

To determine the best possible means of providing quality education within the three participating counties

2.2 Objective 2

To develop through the data and input gained via the project, a contemporary and future oriented philosophy which will enable boards to set immediate and long range goals

2.3 Objective 3

To explore alternative suggestions as well as the hazards, barriers, problems, issues and conditions, that must be addressed successfully in ensuring that the delivery of quality education continues to improve

2.3 Objective 4

To involve those who will share responsibility for meeting project objectives in examining critical issues, determining priorities, developing plans, and acting on them in such a manner that they can successfully resolve the priority issues that are identified in this project

2.4 Objective 5

To provide, according to the parameters of each county's System Evaluation Policy, data which will provide a major/minor component of the jurisdiction's current evaluation needs

2.6 Objective 6

Inter-system cooperation -- to provide through the identification of common problems a basis to explore the potential for maximum utilization of physical, financial and human resources on a cross-county basis

2.7 Specific Objectives

1. Program Development

   To investigate the possibilities of improving current special needs, second language, vocational and secondary program offerings

2. Staffing

   To review current staffing procedures, particularly in the area of: teacher/pupil ratios, combined grades, the hiring of specialist versus generalist staff

3. Facilities

   To ensure the current utilization of facilities is maximized and to explore feasible alternatives

4. Transportation

   To ensure current busing policies and procedures are efficient and to investigate alternatives for improvement

5. Small Schools

   To improve and enhance the current delivery of quality education in small schools through a review of current attendance boundary policies vis-a-vis other available alternative approaches

6. School Size

   To review the critical factors in determining minimum size as regards feasibility of operation with a particular reference to assessing the cost benefit factors involved

3.0 PROJECT SUPERVISION

The project was under the direction of the steering committee described above. This group assisted in establishing the scope and direction of the project, approved each phase of the work, met periodically to monitor progress, and participated in assessing the results of the analysis.

4.0 WORK PLAN

The project proceeded in seven phases: orientation, information gathering, Logic Diagram construction, validation, rating, computer analysis, and review and reports.

4.1 Phase One -- Orientation

Initial project meetings were held in each county as described above. In these three meetings the steering committees were oriented to the procedures associated with conducting a Sage analysis. They then determined the specific directions that the project would follow in each county. The mission statement was confirmed in each meeting. It became the focal point around which all project activities were centered.

The statement of focus or mission statement was then transformed into an "Undesired Event" or "UE". This statement is the opposite of the mission statement in that it directs attention to difficulties that may be experienced in achieving mission success. The UE that was examined was:

> DIFFICULTIES IN PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS SO THAT THEY CAN DEVELOP THEIR INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALS AND BECOME CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

Additional activities that occurred in or as a result of the orientation meetings were the selection of people to be interviewed, arranging meetings, and finalizing the detailed aspects of performing the contract.

4.2 Phase Two -- Information Gathering

Preliminary examination of the issues began in the initial orientation meetings as Steering Committee members contributed their understanding of the issues relevant to accomplishing the mission. However, the majority of the actual analytical work was conducted outside of steering committee meetings by Sage personnel with the people who were designated by the Steering Committee to supply information.

Information was gathered in public meetings and in individual interviews with approximately one thousand seven hundred people from each of the groups and communities in the three counties. Public meetings were held in Rosemary, Alcoma, Tilley, Rolling Hills, Duchess and Bassano in Newell County; Mossleigh, Arrowwood, Milo, Lomond, Carmangay, Champion and Vulcan in Vulcan County; and in Masinisin, Warner, Wrentham, Milk River, Coutts and Raymond in Warner County. Written briefs and submissions were received from one hundred sixty-five people.

The purpose of the information-gathering phase was to identify all of the items that would be rated later in the project. The emphasis in gathering information was on determining issues that participants judged to be crucial to the success of the mission -- not on trivia nor on the identification of individuals who held particular points of view.

The two questions that were asked in the interviews, in the meetings, and in requests for submissions were:

- What suggestions and recommendations do you have for improving education now and in the future?

- What problems, issues, barriers and conditions must be addressed before the improvements which you would like to see can be accomplished?

In this manner, the analysis focused upon factors that may be preventing full realization of the ideal. It examined ideal actions that are not now being taken, and more favorable conditions that do not yet exist. It also considered current and future situations that have the potential to inhibit full accomplishment of the mission.

4.3 Phase Three -- Logic Diagram Construction

The information that was obtained through interviews, meetings, and document review was then placed into the cause-effect format of a logic diagram by Sage analysts.

The logic diagram clearly displays those factors with their causes that could conceivably contribute to the occurrence of the UE previously identified. It lists in cause-effect chains, the prime issues, inhibitors, deficiencies and factors that each participant feels must be addressed in order to achieve mission success. Care was taken to ensure that the information dealt with situations, not with specific persons.

4.4 Phase Four -- Validation

Validation meetings were held with the three county steering committees in Vulcan, Duchess and Warner on April 28, 29, and 30, 1986 respectively. Each member of the three county steering committees was invited to participate. In addition, each steering committee member nominated additional representatives who were invited to assist in validation of the logic diagram. Approximately one hundred individuals participated in each of the three counties.

The purpose of validation was to secure acceptance of the content and structure of the logic diagram. Some changes were introduced, the next stages of the analysis explained, and arrangements for rating were completed.

It became apparent that contradictory explanations for issues were contained in the logic diagram. This was to be expected because of the divergent positions that were often held by the participants who provided information. It must be noted that judgements of the relative merits of issues were not made at this time but were reserved until the next phase. What the validation group accomplished was to assure that the logic diagram was logically constructed, that the content was sufficiently complete, and that it contained accurate descriptions of priority issues from the varying viewpoints of participants.

After the Committee approved necessary modifications to the logic diagram, the information was reformatted into booklets in preparation for rating.

4.5 Phase Five -- Rating

The steering committee and the individuals who had previously participated in validation were asked to rate (quantify) the validated items that appeared in the rating booklets. Rating sessions were held on May 5, 6, and 7 in Warner, Vulcan and Duchess. Two hundred forty-nine booklets (87 from Warner County, 93 from Newell County, and 68 from Vulcan County with 1 unidentified) were completed in these rating sessions. Those that were retained by the participants were returned to Sage in Edmonton within a few days.

Raters individually were asked to make judgements regarding the following:

- The relative importance of each item
- The degree of familiarity or amount of knowledge the rater possessed relative to each specific item
- The likelihood of occurrence or future frequency of the item
- The ease with which the item could be resolved, either by correction or avoidance

The purpose for rating was to secure individual judgements about the severity or cruciality of the items that are in the logic diagram and the rating booklets. From these judgements the collective priorities of participating groups were determined. Questions regarding the process were answered during the rating sessions.

4.6 Phase Six -- Computer Analysis

The computer analysis produced a set of Strategic Event Values (SEV's), item by item, for each of the eleven rating groups that were of interest to the Steering Committee. The groups were:

For the County of Warner:

- Teachers 5
- Administrators 6
- Parents of children in school 41
- Residents, no children in school 12
- Students 9
- Board members. 5
- Bus drivers 5
- Support staff. 4
- All residents of the County of Warner. 87
- Members of the County of Warner Steering Committee . 29
- All members of the Tri-County Steering Committee . . 89

For the County of Newell:

- Teachers 11
- Administrators 5
- Parents of children in school 57
- Residents, no children in school 7
- Students 5

- o Board members 3
- o Bus drivers and support staff 5
- o All residents of the County of Newell. 93
- o Members of the County of Newell Steering Committee . 33
- o All members of the Tri-County Steering Committee . . 89

For the County of Vulcan:

- o Teachers 6
- o Administrators 6
- o Parents of children in school 34
- o Residents, no children in school 6
- o Students 4
- o Board members 6
- o Bus drivers and support staff 6
- o All residents of the County of Vulcan. 68
- o Members of the County of Vulcan Steering Committee . 24
- o All members of the Tri-County Steering Committee . . 89

A separate analysis was prepared for six of the Vulcan residents whose rating booklets were delayed in transit due to the severe storm that occurred in mid May.

The SEV's provide a measure of the consensus held by each group concerning the severity or cruciality of the items that appear in the logic diagram. Similarities and differences in priorities from one group to another can be read directly from the charts produced by the computer.

4.7 Phase Seven -- Review and Reports

When the computer analysis was completed, a meeting was held with the three steering committees and the other raters on May 27, 28, and 29, 1986 to receive and review the project findings.

The results of the analysis are presented and illustrated in the computer-produced documents and charts showing SEV's and priority issues from the perspectives of each of the participating groups. The similarities and differences among groups regarding their differing perceptions of high priority issues, inhibitors, deficiencies, and factors are readily apparent. The report of findings follows.

5.0 RESULTS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The report of results is comprised of the computer-produced charts mentioned above, (copies were delivered to the project Steering Committee Chairmen on May 27, 28 and 29); a series of computer-produced reporting documents (Appendix A) which provide the SEV's for each item and for each of the participating groups; and the narrative summary of results which follows.

A primary chart (the validated Sage diagram) was given to each county. It contains the input received from all of the interviewees. While the various groups identified only a few of the items as critical, every item represents a basic concern held by someone in the interview group. Ultimately attention may need to be given to each item in the primary chart.

The primary chart graphically portrays the issues that the participants have judged to be essential to accomplishment of the mission. The high priorities of the participating groups are indicated by color-coded dots. The similarities and differences in priorities between and among the groups can be read directly. The relative importance of each item from the differing perspective of each group is demonstrated on the partial charts described below.

The partial charts, one for each participating group, contain the Strategic Event Values for each priority item. The items are ranked in descending order of priority. Those that appear on the top line are the primary areas of concern, with the second, third, etc., priorities appearing sequentially below. Comparing these partial charts facilitates examination of similarities and differences in the weightings that the various groups place upon the priorities that were identified in the project.

Appendix A, the original computer-produced reporting document, and the charts mentioned above have been retained and distributed by the steering committee in each county.

5.2 NARRATIVE REPORT

This narrative report is a summary of the items that were judged to be critical by project participants, ie., it is a repetition of the information marked by the color-coded dots on the three primary charts, one of which was prepared for each county. It provides an overview of project findings for the three counties, concentrating on the issues that groups judged to be most critical. Statistical analysis of results of Sage analysis projects indicates that these priorities could be expected to emerge in a repetition of the study with similar participants, nineteen times out of twenty. It can also be expected that these priorities will remain viable until there is approximately a twenty per cent change in conditions.

Additional detail concerning the order of priority in which the items were ranked by each group can be ascertained from an examination of the partial charts that were prepared for each of the participating groups, copies of which are in the possession of the three steering committees.

The purpose of the project was to discover priorities that participants feel are crucial to accomplishing the mission. The mission was:

> TO PROVIDE QUALITY EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES FOR ALL STUDENTS SO THAT THEY CAN DEVELOP THEIR INDIVIDUAL POTENTIALS AND BECOME CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS OF SOCIETY

Seven general areas were identified as having a bearing upon this purpose. They were: factors associated with the Alberta Government and Alberta Education; factors associated with the County Board of Education and the Council; factors associated with County Office Administration and the Superintendent; factors associated with students, parents and the public; problems associated with school principals, classroom teachers and auxiliary staff; factors associated with curriculum and course offerings; and factors associated with school facilities and transportation.

Certain items under each of the preceding seven categories were identified as critical by some project participants. These priorities are reported below in the general order of priority ascribed to them by the entire group of 249 participants. The priorities of each sub group can only be ascertained by examining the partial charts referred to above.

BRANCH B: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION AND COUNCIL

UNSATISFACTORY TEACHERS

Factors in the B Branch are considered to be of prime importance by most participants of the project. Of particular concern is the matter of dealing effectively with mediocre or incompetent teachers. It seems that some mediocre teachers are being "carried" and sometimes protected by capable, conscientious teachers. In addition, participants feel that ATA policies make it difficult for poor teachers to be removed. There is inadequate attention by the ATA to making sure that all teachers perform satisfactorily -- too much emphasis is placed upon tenure. It is noted that the board has difficulty transferring or firing staff when their community ties are strong. There is hesitation to uproot inadequate teachers when they have purchased homes in the community; there is loss of freedom of choice if teachers are compelled to live in the community where they teach; and there is no definite policy that a teacher cannot teach the same grade in the same schools for longer than a set time. It is suggested that the board encourage the exchange of competent teaching staff from school to school approximately every five years.

RECOGNITION FOR EXCELLENT TEACHERS

Participants point out that there needs to be more incentive for teachers who have a record of excellence to stay in the rural areas. Teachers' salaries are not linked to competence -- merit pay. There is a lack of criteria for identifying and rewarding the capable and conscientious teachers who dedicate long hours of extra-curricular, marking and preparation time. It is suggested that a solid public relations program underwritten by the school board could facilitate giving honor and recognition to the many excellent teachers there are in the county. Participants claim that teachers are being criticized and evaluated by people in the community who are not competent to do so. Also there are those in the community who feel that salaried people such as teachers should not be getting increases when others are having tough times financially.

INEQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

There is dissatisfaction with the inequality of educational opportunities available to students in both large and small schools. It seems that many small communities accept limited programs in an effort to justify the continued existence of small schools, largely because of the loss of community spirit in small centers when their schools are closed. As well, the larger schools do not seem to be providing quality education with better programs, teachers and facilities. Lower teacher/pupil ratios in the smaller schools, academic excellence, greater parent and student involvement and an atmosphere which is more supportive of moral and religious values are reasons given for preferring smaller schools. There is also a widespread reluctance of parents and students to accept an increased time on buses.

On the other hand, participants point out that the concentration upon maintaining the current number of small schools is interfering with the efficient delivery of quality educational opportunities for all students. Keeping small schools open contributes to large sized classes in the larger schools and there is a reduction in programs for all students. There is difficulty maintaining consistency in programs when the number of teachers is based on student enrolment which fluctuates frequently. Reasons for shrinking school populations are: the trend for young people to no longer stay on family farms; the current popularity of private schools; and the fact that some parents choose to send their children outside the county where they can have a wider selection of course offerings. There is a failure of the county school board to redistribute school populations by changing the attendance boundaries so that those small schools furthest from large centers will remain viable.

Private schools are seen as providing a higher quality of education with grading systems which are more demanding than the public schools. In addition, private schools uphold the values that are important to many parents.

There is concern that non-academic graduates from small schools where programs are severely limited do not have the skills needed to compete in society. This is largely due to overemphasis upon matriculation courses in small schools where student numbers limit course offerings. It seems that there is insufficient willingness of every member of the community involved to accept some changes. Some schools remain open to accommodate the convenience and political preference of parents. Participants suggest that there are some people who do not express their approval of centralization in public for fear that their point of view will not be accepted.

SCHOOL BOARD GOALS, POLICIES AND PRIORITIES

There is concern that the board does not have long-term goals, objectives, or philosophies that are known by the public and followed and which are focussed primarily on the educational needs of children. There are unsatisfactory policies about school attendance areas, boundaries, closure, centralization, and de-centralization. The school board is not setting a number at which a school is considered to be no longer economically viable, and then deciding an acceptable alternative in consultation with parents. Participants note that it is difficult for a divided board to make long range plans for the entire school system. In particular, there is dissatisfaction with school-related matters being decided by county councillors before the board holds its formal meeting.

The board has not provided educational improvements through combining some county schools.

Project participants point out that some board members do not place sufficient priority on education. It seems that some people are elected to the Board of Education for political rather than educational reasons. It is suggested that the electorate does not take sufficient interest in county elections to assure that capable, interested, and qualified individuals are elected to office. Some elected personnel show too little interest in educational matters. This might be remedied by limiting elected board members to two consecutive terms in office, by these officials showing more interest in receiving the input of parents and students, and currently by showing more interest in the Tri-County Educational Project rather than being pessimistic about it.

CREATIVE ALTERNATIVES

There also is concern that the Board of Education and County Council are not providing creative educational alternatives. There seems to be limited acceptance of new approaches and techniques: computer teaching aids for drill in basics so that teachers can use their time more profitably; experts from outside the system to give instruction in technical areas that the local teachers are not prepared to teach; and combining jurisdictions such as Newell County and Brooks School District to improve education by pooling resources. It is suggested that vocational schools are needed in Brooks, Vulcan and Raymond.

BOARD AND COUNTY COUNCIL STRUCTURE

Problems related to the organizational structures of boards and county councils are noted. It seems that legislation does not permit the election of a regular school board whose only purpose is school affairs and who have the sole authority to manage school financing. Board members tend to represent the interests of their own community in the decisions they make rather than the interests of students. Participants note that the board listens and acts on the recommendations of small lobby groups to the detriment of equality of educational opportunities for all students. There is political side-stepping when Council is reluctant to act when it may be politically unpopular.

There is a lack of sense of partnership between board, schools and the community. The board is seen as being too isolated from the people it serves.

EDUCATIONAL FUNDING

Some difficulties related to local funding were pointed out. County officials do not realize that residents are willing to pay more in taxes for better education but not for more bureaucracy. On the other hand, there are some people wanting old-fashioned teachers, teaching in the latest state-of-the-art techniques, using modern facilities, without tax increases. There is limited understanding that the retention of small schools is a major cost that would be reduced if some centralization were to occur. The public has insufficient understanding of the influence of Hutterite and private schools on the local educational budget. It is suggested that the board create and maintain financial reports that are understandable, complete, easily accessible and timely. This is not being done because the superintendent and support staff are being overworked and spread too thinly to prepare the required financial information. Also, an assistant secretary treasurer is needed who has direct responsibility for Board of Education financial affairs.

BRANCH D: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH STUDENTS, PARENTS AND THE PUBLIC

MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS

Student motivational problems are considered to be of greatest concern to most participants. There is too little attention to instilling in students a love of learning. Good study habits are not emphasized enough in Elementary and Jr. High. It is suggested that there be greater emphasis on the importance of students continuing the educational process beyond High School. This is not being done when schools have a restricted academic curriculum that does not allow students to have sufficient choice of careers. More career counselling services provided by outside agencies such as the universities, colleges, and Alberta career counsellors are suggested. In addition, more career days, seminars, field trips, and guidance counselling for Grade Twelve students who plan to further their education is needed. It is suggested that students considering higher education visit classes at post-secondary institutions to see what the courses will be like.

Some students are bored with school when course materials are presented in uninteresting ways. There is insufficient emphasis on the needs of gifted and above average students in the classroom. Loss of stimulation/excitement in learning situations occurs as enrolments drop. There is a need for more healthy competion in academic pursuits. Participants feel that there is inordinate emphasis being placed upon special education to the neglect of the more regular course offerings.

Some students are being given homework assignments without a proper explanation and then being marked on it before they have a chance to understand it.

STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Participants in the project noted that some students are convinced that they cannot be successful in school. In regard to special education there seems to be difficulty in providing adequate opportunities in the child's own small community. There is insufficient assessment of the adequacy of all special needs programs and students. In particular there is inadequate identification and treatment of students with learning disabilities. Another area of concern is the resource room program. There is an absence of resource room programs beyond the Elementary grades in most schools. There is a call to elminate the requirement that a child be two years behind his

grade before resource room help is given. It is also pointed out that resource rooms waste time and money due to too much paper work, delays, not enough use of aides or parents, and the fact that students miss their other work.

HELP FOR REGULAR STUDENTS

Regular students requiring additional help are having difficulty receiving it when there is insufficient use and availability of tutors. Some teachers are not preparing students adequately for departmental exams. It is suggested that a "homework hot line" be set up and maintained to help students who are having problems doing homework. Another recommendation is the posting of a listing of teachers who are available during spares so that students have someone to consult when they require additional help.

There is a need for more attention to making schools pleasant places in which to learn. In particular, counselling services are needed for grades 7 to 12 regarding opportunities and scholarships. Access to well-trained guidance counsellors to assist with personal, emotional, and behavioural problems from grades 1 through 12 would be helpful. Participants point out that students find it difficult to learn from teachers they dislike or do not respect.

PARENTS/COMMUNITY/SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS

There are unresolved issues related to parents and the community. Apathy toward education by some parents is shown when they do not accept the opportunities given to them to have input into schooling decisions, do not participate in the school, or look on school as a babysitting service. It seems that some parents do not understand nor appreciate what the schools are trying to accomplish. They do not have sufficient understanding of what teachers must cope with in classes when they do not visit on a regular basis. As well, some parents believe exaggerated accounts of teachers' actions given to them by their children. Some parents tend to judge their own educational experience as being superior to current educational opportunities for their children. There is insufficient awareness of what is happening in education both in a local and global sense. The hours, holidays, duties of teachers are not understood nor appreciated.

Parents are not receiving enough information from the schools regarding their children's performance. In particular, there is a call for more written comments on report cards to give a more comprehensive statement of how students are progressing.

Some parents have difficulty communicating with the school staff and superintendent. Some students and parents fear retaliation if they complain about unprofessional conduct of teachers.

Some parents are not effectively assisting their children with educational problems. As homework becomes more and more advanced many parents are not able to help their children with homework. Attention toward trivia is sometimes seen at meetings of parent-school organizations. Home and School, Parent/Teacher, and Parent Advisory Committees are not functioning when there are no shared goals. It seems that some parents allow or demand that their children's lives be overly regimented with such things as hockey, figure skating, music lessons, and clubs as well as school activities and homework.

BRANCH E: PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS, CLASSROOM TEACHERS AND AUXILIARY STAFF

TEACHING SKILLS

Of prime concern to project participants are unenthusiastic and uncaring teachers. There is a call for some teachers to be more creative in planning and presenting instruction. It is felt that soft touch positions with insufficient accountability and lifetime guarantees are attracting some unsuitable people to teaching careers. Some teachers are not keeping current in their knowledge of subjects they are teaching. It is suggested that some teachers need to become more involved with students in clubs or group activities other than sports at lunchtime. Insensitivity by some teachers towards children experiencing social, emotional or learning disability problems was claimed.

It is noted that low teacher morale is getting in the way of quality education when teachers are assigned to teach subjects they are not specifically trained to teach, are given unclear and incomplete outlines of courses, and/or receive inadequate resource material. Another reason for low morale and fatigue is that only a few teachers tend to shoulder the responsibility for extra-curricular supervision.

There is a call for some teachers to be more committed to quality education for each individual student. Participants object to the practice of some teachers leaving the mastery of material too much up to the students. Some teachers are showing favoritism toward a few students while others are ignored. There needs to be more accent upon all students being

able to progress at their own individual rate. Some teachers spend time outside of the classroom after giving assignments. It is felt that average students are lost in the extra emphasis being given to gifted and problem students.

Some teachers are using ineffective teaching methods. There is too much emphasis on homework -- work given that students already know how to do or that they do not understand. Homework assignments need to be balanced.

It is suggested that there be more adequate screening and training of teachers. Participants recommend that the government require teachers to upgrade their qualifications periodically. Poor teachers should be weeded out early in their practice teaching experience. Some beginning teachers are not being given sufficient practice teaching experience.

There is a call to use teacher aides as instructional assistants rather than for superficial tasks only.

LEADERSHIP OF PRINCIPALS

It is noted that some principals do not exhibit strong leadership skills. In some schools there is insufficient concentration upon making the primary grades the priority. There is insufficient emphasis upon lower teacher/pupil ratios in the lower grades so that children will be assured of a good start in the basics of reading and arithmetic. When elementary and secondary schools are combined there needs to be adequate administrative and supervisory help to the elementary grades. It is noted that some elementary students feel abandoned when teachers are allowed to take leaves of absence during the school year.

Some principals demonstrate limited instructional leadership. There is a call for programs to be changed to meet changing needs and to provide all the educational alternatives that are open to students and teachers.

It is suggested that principals be given sufficient time to manage the school -- teaching assignments should not interfere.

MANAGEMENT OF DISCIPLINE

There is dissatisfaction with the management of discipline which should be fair, consistent, supported and practiced at home and at school. Teachers need backing by parents, students, administrators and the board regarding the handling of discipline problems. There need to be clearer rules on a

county level regarding such things as skipping, refusal to do assignments, disobedience of classroom rules, use of foul language, talking back to teachers, and use of cars. Some parents are not supporting discipline given at school when principals and teachers use methods which belittle students and cause loss of self-esteem. There would be more support if discipline was of a learning nature.

Participants note that there is too much tolerance of undisciplined students who are not sincere about their education. Some in-school administrators need to recognize that parents support a closed campus-- they do not like to see students wandering and driving around at any time during school hours. There should be less hesitation to suspend and expell continuously disruptive students and it is suggested that students be held accountable for regular class attendance.

TIME-TABLING AND SCHEDULING

Inadequacies in time-tabling and scheduling of school activities were further concerns related to school management. Students are not able to get the courses they want or need when they register. This could be remedied by the investigation of alternative ways of timetabling in small schools. Computer or McBee systems could be used. In some schools it seems that arrangements are made more for the benefit of teachers than students. Reasons that have little to do with education are used to justify decisions about program availability for students. In some cases band programs receive too much attention.

When students are in the "cycle" system in some small schools, they have to take courses too advanced for them. In Senior High, timetabling is arranged in such a way that there are an inordinate number of spare periods. It is preferred that spares be more evenly distributed throughout High School grades. Unequal course loads from one semester to the next are also a problem that participants noted.

BRANCH G: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH SCHOOL FACILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION

BUSING CONCERNS

School busing was the prime concern in this section. There is over-reliance on circle bus routes which require children who live close to school to ride for an extended period of time. Buses having to make connections cause additional travelling time. It is believed that bus drivers are competing with each

other to have the most miles for their route. Some parents want bus routes and schedules tailored to individual convenience rather than for overall busing efficiency. Participants recommend there be more consultation with them regarding streamlining bus routes.

It is felt that there should be more concern regarding the effects of long bus rides on the performance of children in school and that more care should be taken to ensure that no student is picked up earlier than 7:30 a.m. Students with long bus rides, chores, homework and other activities have unrealistic pressures placed upon them. It is recommended that there be a bus seating plan for safety, passenger comfort, and better discipline. Over-crowding of school buses and students not dressing warmly in cold weather were also noted.

Participants would like to see a bus supervisor hired to interpret rules, hire and fire drivers, and be responsible for buses in general. There needs to be more adequate evaluation of bus drivers. Parents would appreciate being given written notice of rules that apply to students on buses.

Unsatisfactory heating and/or air conditioning systems and inadequate insulation in some schools are concerns that need attention. There is also a call for lunchrooms, cafeterias, and hot lunch programs. It is suggested more adequate facilities for drama, art, library and media centers are needed. Participants would like to see multiple use of school facilities for the benefit of all people in the community.

EQUIPMENT AND SERVICES

Regarding school equipment and services, it is suggested that a multi-jurisdictional instructional materials center may be needed. There needs to be greater access to libraries of computer programs. In addition, it is noted that school libraries which lack essential reference books are not being set up to accommodate the knowledge explosion.

Participants would like to see improvements to school fences, parking lots, grounds, playing fields and equipment.

BRANCH F: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH CURRICULUM AND COURSE OFFERINGS

It is suggested that more attention be given to public speaking, discussions, debates, and creative writing. Some students are not being taught how to write term papers. There is a lack of agreement about best means of instructing children to read -- some favor phonics while others prefer development of sight vocabularies. The educational system is not equiping students with the necessary coping skills to adapt successfully to our rapidly changing world. There are limited options at Junior and Senior High and limited exposure to cultural events. In addition, participants would like to see more attention to sports activities that benefit more than only a selected few students.

Participants point out that special project experiences are not useful unless there is a legitimate purpose for the project and it is carried through to a logical conclusion. There is dissatisfaction with compulsory options caused by the lack of enough qualified instructors in a variety of courses. Some people question the educational value of science fairs in Grades 1, 2 and 3. It is felt that camping, swimming and skiing trips are unnecessary frills which could be taken care of by families. There is disagreement about the place of Outdoor Education in the curriculum. Work Experience is relatively useless unless employers have students do more than routine chores. There is a need for more mentor/work experience type of programs in central locations. Access to vocational programs is too limited.

BRANCH A: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE ALBERTA GOVERNMENT AND ALBERTA EDUCATION

RURAL ISSUES

Participants would like to see more effort made through government educational grant structures to assure that life on the family farm remains viable by assuring that basic educational programs are available within a reasonable busing distance of every farm. Grant structure seems to be contributing to inferior education in rural areas as compared with larger centers. There must be greater recognition that government per pupil grants are placing pressures on programs in areas where population is decreasing. It seems that there is over-emphasis on money at the expense of what is best for students. Participants are convinced that the government is willing to spend huge sums on such things as Social Services and penal institutions, while skimping on preventive measures provided through adequate schooling. There is a call for

provision of higher grants for continuance of rural schools where transportation of students from one school to another is not feasible. It is recommended that the government establish an independent educational agency, in structure similar to the Energy Resources Conservation Board, to determine location and program of school centers that can service the rural population of the Province. It is pointed out that the government is ignoring requests for changing grant structures until the board effects economies of operation by closing uneconomical schools.

Current Provincial Government regulations make the expenditure of educational funds too rigid to accommodate local circumstances. There is local dissatisfaction with Provincial funding priorities that permit unnecessary repairs and alterations to be made but do not permit those funds to be used in needed program improvments.

Participants feel that the Provincial Government is not addressing the problems of dwindling rural populations of school age people and its relationship to the economic crisis in agriculture and the survival of the family farm. It is noted that the public is asked for input regarding rural needs and then have their concerns and suggestions ignored. There is a need for more industry and commerce in rural Alberta to attract young families to settle or remain. Current depressed prices of oil and agricultural products is adversely affecting the amounts of money available for education in the Province. There is a call for an educational system with fewer bureaucrats and more teachers in the classroom.

PROVINCE-WIDE ISSUES

It is suggested that the Provincial Government make the school year the same throughout the Province with breaks occurring at the same time. Participants feel that departmental exams are a better indicator of how students handle stress than they are a measure of knowledge. There needs to be more careful matching of texts with curriculum changes. More care needs to be taken to ensure that information presented in the curriculum is historically accurate, unbiased and complete. It is felt that the curriculum is being designed for superior students with the result that many students are struggling and losing self-esteem. There are too many subjects, too much detail, too many exams required of students.

BRANCH C: FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH COUNTY OFFICE ADMINISTRATION AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

TEACHER EVALUATION

Deficiencies in the teacher evaluation system are the prime concern in Branch C. Participants call for more parental and student input related to teacher evaluation. There is a lack of valid criteria that can be used to evaluate teachers. Some teachers are not being evaluated with sufficient regularity and thoroughness. It is felt that some evaluators (superintendents, Regional Office personnel, principals) are out of touch with current classroom conditions. There is a a recommendation that teacher evaluation be done on a non-appointment basis.

The ATA does not seem to be effective in weeding out incompetent teachers and principals. There is limited public understanding of the role and performance of the ATA in identifying and removing incompetent teachers and administrators. Insufficient outside assessment of teachers is being carried out. It is noted that there is limited qualified manpower to carry out effective evaluation of teachers. There is a call for a longer trial period of new teachers to assess their ability more adequately.

It is recommended that an ombudsman-like person be appointed to record and investigate parents' concerns regarding poor teachers.

ADMINISTRATION

Participants would like to see better communication between the board and janitors in resolving issues associated with assignments arising from such things as community use of schools, after-hour use by students, teachers and the general public.

It is noted that numerous duties in Central Office, insufficient manpower, especially in the Secretary/Treasurer's Office, make it difficult for the Superintendent to spend sufficient time in the schools. There is a call for more classroom visits by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. It seems there is insufficient manpower in Central Office to carry out educational, advisory, supervisory, administrative and planning functions for county schools. Participants point out that greater teamwork between and among central office staff and teaching staff is needed. Some employees are discrediting county officials and board members. It is suggested that some parents and students should resolve problems at the school level rather than running to the Board and Central Office.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE THREE COUNTY AND THE TRI-COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEES

In the several days following the meetings held in the three counties on May 27, 28 and 29, the recommendations formulated by steering committee members were assembled into the formats reported below.

5.3.1 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE VULCAN COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

The following recommendations were formulated and placed in the order of priority indicated by the Vulcan County Steering Committee. They were drawn from the priority suggestions developed by the membership of the entire group that participated in rating.

1. Insufficient recognition that government per pupil grants are placing pressures on programs in areas where population is decreasing

2. Recommend that probation period for teachers be extended from one to two years with extensive evaluation before permanent contract is offered and that permanent contracts be renewed every five years with evaluation consideration given to parent and student input. Greater autonomy be given in hiring and firing of teachers at the local school board level

3. Lower teacher/pupil ratio, especially in primary grades. Earlier identification of learning problems and no more than three grades in a classroom

4. Elect a school board with one representative from each school area, rural or town

5. Board to develop a school closure policy and long-term goals

6. Rotating specialty teachers for more course selection. More parental involvement using community resource people. More school spirit. Gifted and talented programs extended

7. Some method of formulating ways of rewarding superior staff rather than using the present grid system only

8. Public Relations -- better communications with the board, school, teachers and parents. Report cards are not containing enough information. More teacher comments and more reporting periods within the school semester would be helpful. Better communication with the council, school board and parents

9. Students be taught the necessary skills for high school and beyond such as good study habits, preparation of term papers and public speaking. Attention should be given to creative writing in Language and English, to Math and to Science in all grades. There should be adequate guidance and career counselling in Junior High and Senior High school

10. A more regimented school discipline policy to be formulated and enforced

5.3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE NEWELL COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

The following recommendations were prepared by the Newell County Steering Committee. They include the common recommendations of all the groups that rated the significance of issues.

Issues and recommendations directed toward --

A. Government:

1. An improved method of allocating financial resources to rural jurisdictions should be established

2. The structure of the county system and school board representation should be reviewed

3. Greater flexibility in school board budgeting should be implemented

4. Leadership training for teachers should be implemented at the university level of instruction

B. County of Newell Board of Education:

1. Greater parental involvement in schools and use of community expertise should be encouraged

2. Communication and visibility should be improved

3. Greater support for teachers should be encouraged

C. School Facilities:

1. Closure of small schools should be investigated and a move to centralization should be considered

2. Better utilization of facilities within the County should be investigated

3. Greater cooperation with Brooks in facility utilization should be investigated

4. The community school concept should be considered

5. Maintenance of small schools should occur

6. The need for a vocational high school in the County or in conjunction with Medicine Hat College should be investigated

D. Instructional Staff:

1. A greater emphasis should be placed on evaluation of teachers

2. The regular upgrading of teachers, via in-servicing and sabbaticals, should be encouraged

3. The dismissal of incompetent teachers and principals should occur

4. There should be a greater emphasis on teacher specialization

5. The possibility of the sharing of County, Brooks, and Tri-County professional expertise should be fostered

E. Curriculum and Instruction:

1. A greater emphasis may be directed towards the teaching of Language Arts throughout the system

2. There should be a greater emphasis on providing and encouraging students to take challenging courses

3. There should be an emphasis on courses which offer living skills

4. There should be a greater emphasis on the elementary areas, particularly grades 1 - 3

5. A variety of relevant vocational courses should be offered

6. There should be a greater emphasis on core subjects

7. A greater emphasis should be placed on the study of foreign language (French)

G. Policy:

1. Refinement and enforcement of discipline and attendance policies should occur

2. Policies should be standardized across County schools

3. Bus travel time for students should be minimized

4. A staff rotation policy should be developed

5.3.3 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WARNER COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

Members of the Warner County Steering Committee and the individuals who rated the significance of issues met on May 29, 1986 in Warner. They received the report of priorities and formulated a number of recommendations. These recommendations were submitted without summarization to Sage Institute. Sage personnel then compiled the following summary of recommendations from the notes submitted by Warner County participants in the Tri-County Educational Improvement Project.

It is recommended --

A. With respect to teachers:

1. That the Board assure that principals and superintendents evaluate teachers on a regular basis through providing sufficient staff and direction to accomplish the task

2. That the teaching profession take responsibilty for self-evaluation

3. That unbiased teacher evaluation teams be available to perform objective evaluations

4. That teacher evaluation policies provide for some input from students and parents

5. That teacher evaluation policies include such areas as individual strengths; areas which need improvement; interactions with staff members, students and parents; teaching effectiveness, etc.

6. That teachers, with Board support, be involved in continual efforts to upgrade their skills in such areas as curriculum content and instructional methodologies

7. That classroom teachers exhibit greater professionalism by remaining in the classrooms during class time, facilitating student learning while in the classroom, and treating students with respect

8. That the Board develop a policy for hiring, firing, transferring and retaining teachers that will contribute toward developing and maintaining a high quality teaching staff

9. That stagnation of the teaching staff be avoided by changing teaching assignments periodically -- change the assigned subject area, community, school, or grade level

10. Provide continuous in-service opportunites for teachers including leaves of absences for attending workshops or extending formal training

11. That the Board investigate a system of merit pay to be administered as a part of its evaluation system

B. With respect to the Board:

1. That each community have a representative on the Board of Education who is interested in the quality of education of the children

C. With respect to the Community:

1. That there be more involvement of the community in the schools

2. That the County establish more community schools

3. That more community representatives be involved in their area of expertise in assisting with the instruction of children

4. That the Board encourage parents to support students and teachers

5. That parents avoid negative discussion of teachers and schools in the presence of students

6. That more joint school-community activities be organized such as hot lunch programs, use of parents as resource persons, etc.

D. With respect to courses of study and student programs:

1. That greater emphasis be placed on the mastery of English, including reading, writing, spelling, grammar, creative writing

2. That special programs to meet special needs be available in all schools and in all grades where there is a need

3. That every rural high school offer a complete high school program, both general diploma and academic diploma, so that graduates can enter the post-secondary institution or career of their choice

4. That the semester system be discontinued (some disagreement with this recommendation)

5. That travelling teachers of specialty subjects be assigned to rural schools to preserve more equality of opportunity throughout the County

E. With respect to reporting of student progress:

1. That report cards and reporting systems be more informative to parents

2. That the grading systems of individual teachers be better explained to parents

F. With respect to busing:

1. That buses follow the same routes in the evening as they do in the morning to effect a first on -- first off policy as far as possible

2. That the length of bus rides be minimized

G. With respect to school closures:

1. That the community be given early and accurate information concerning schools where closing is becoming a possiblity

2. That student numbers not be used as the only criterion in determining whether or not a school is to be closed. Student and community needs should also be considered

3. That qualities of small schools such as high academic levels, close parent-teacher communication, excellent discipline, good study and work habits not be lost by unnecessary school closures

4. That the Board resolve which schools are to stay open and close those where the quality of educational opportunity has dropped, even if there are some emotional outbursts

H. With respect to communication:

1. That communication links between the Provincial Government, Alberta Education, the county, the schools, teachers and parents be strengthened

2. That schools issue periodic newletters to keep the community informed about school matters

I. With respect to students:

1. That teachers and parents cooperate more fully in instituting disciplinary measures that are firm, fair and consistent

2. That the combined efforts of teachers and parents be directed toward improving the motivation levels of students

3. That nearby high schools be combined in order to provide a more stimulating, motivating and exciting atmosphere for students

4. That teachers communicate more frequently with parents concerning homework, successes of students, etc.

5. That students have greater access to qualified counsellors.

6. That students be given more information about the range of career possibilities that may be open to them

J. With respect to teacher training:

1. That teacher training include more training and practice in maintaining discipline in classrooms

2. That greater standardization of the content of teacher education be required by government

K. With respect to Provincial Government educational policies:

1. That grants be based on program requirements rather than on per pupil counts

2. That consideration be given to the differences in providing a quality education in rural as compared with urban communities

Three individuals made comprehensive sets of recommendations which have been retained by the Board. The substance of these additional recommendations is largely covered by the composite set listed above.

5.3.4 RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TRI-COUNTY STEERING COMMITTEE

The Tri-County Steering Committee in its final meeting held in Lethbridge on June 23, 1986, directed Sage Institute to report the consensus emanating from the three counties as the recommendations of the Tri-County Steering Committee. Consequently, the recommendations which appear below have been prepared by Sage Institute. They represent the judgements of Sage personnel concerning matters that seem to be of common interest among the Tri-County Steering Committee.

IT IS RECOMMENDED --

A. That the current method of allocating educational grants primarily on a per pupil basis be modified to include distribution of funds to meet basic, approved educational program needs so that the continuous deterioration in quality and quantity of programs available to students in areas where school populations are low and/or declining can be ameliorated

B. That greater attention be given to improving excellence in teaching and in the teaching force by identifying strengths and needs, and by implementing more effective programs in teacher and administrator selection, training, placement, in-service, evaluation with more public input, rewarding excellence and dismissing the incompentent or unsuitable

C. That the Board of Education have at least one representative from each community and that the representative be a person who is interested in the the quality of education for each child

D. That school closure policies be clarified and acted upon where closures are indicated

E. That more community involvement in the operation of schools be encouraged, including the establishment of community schools and/or the community school philosophy

F. That specialty courses and teachers be made more available to small schools, through providing travelling teachers and sharing teacher resources among neighboring schools and jurisdictions

G. That communication systems be improved, including communication among the boards, administrators, teachers, and parents -- there is widespread interest in improving formal school and student reporting procedures and formats

H. That greater emphasis be given to student programs in English, creative writing and in all of the language arts and core subject skills

I. That adequate guidance and counselling be provided for all students so that they will have accurate information and motivation to pursue challenging vocational objectives

J. That consistent, firm and fair student disciplinary policies be formulated and implemented.

5.4 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SAGE INSTITUTE

Responsibility for this section of the narrative report rests solely with Sage Institute of Canada Inc. It is based on the findings of the project and upon personal assessments of priority issues made by Sage Institute staff in contacts with project participants. These observations and recommendations are included in compliance with a directive from Alberta Education, which made funding of the project conditional upon including the perceptions and recommendations of Sage Institute personnel. It must therefore not be assumed that the content of Section 5.4 necessarily reflects the priorities of project participants.

Upon examining project results and the recommendations of the steering committees, it seems to the Sage team that the most critical needs and areas where productive action should be taken are addressed in the recommedations which follow.

IT IS RECOMMENDED --

A. For action by all agencies and individuals involved in education;

1. That greater attention be given to the interna as contrasted with the externa of education. While providing buildings, books, teachers, curricula, etc., are essential to successful education, what happens to children, how they learn, and what the effects of educational experiences are upon children should be the major focus of government, boards, staff, parents and the community

2. That the goals, objectives, philosophies and policies of government, boards, schools and communities be clarified and focussed more precisely upon the educational needs of children. As a consequence it should be possible to observe that the actions of every person involved in education are being directed toward the educational benefit of children. There would be no instances of schools existing for the convenience of parents, teachers, bus drivers, janitors or local politicians. Providing productive, creative educational experiences for children would be the primary motive for every action taken. This would translate into government and board funding and administrative programs in the areas of school buildings, space utilization, busing, and special grants of all kinds that accommodate student educational needs above any other criteria

3. That mandatory in-service leadership and management training be made available at all levels. Understanding the principles of situational leadership and participative management may assist designers of curriculum and those who organize schools to recognize the leadership requirements that are necessary to educate adolescents, thereby addressing the deep malaise that is affecting Junior High Schools. It may also assist supervisors to become more accepted members of instructional teams, principals to exercise more dynamic instructional leadership, teachers to secure the cooperation of colleagues, parents, and students

4. That the goal of providing equality of educational opportunity be re-examined. Small rural schools do not have access to the breadth of educational programs that are available in larger schools, especially in the urban schools. It is time that boards and Alberta Education seriously address distance education as one possible means of alleviating this major problem

5. That evaluation of school systems, programs, schools and personnel be further developed and implemented

6. That greater openness, more frank discussion, more formal and informal communication be implemented. The positive relationships between and among all parties to the educational process that charactize the successful community schools should be charactistic of all school-related interactions

7. That a renewed emphasis upon generating creative solutions to problems be mounted. In-service activities devoted to creativity development of personnel at all levels could be useful in generating the enthusiasm needed to resolve the types of issues identified by participants in this project. People look for increased ingenuity in managing the scarce human and financial resources that are allocated to the educational enterprise

8. That teachers, administrators, parents and the boards be caring, enthusiastic, creative, accountable and committed to a quality education for every child, a situation that would contribute to improved morale among those who work with and in the interests of children

B. For action by Alberta Education;

1. That investigation of alternate forms of funding education in rural areas be undertaken, particularly in relation to the impacts of funding mechanisms on jurisdictions that have small and declining enrolments

   This recommendation is made in recognition of the following factors:

   a) The current formula being based primarily on per pupil counts contributes toward reductions in programs when enrolments decrease

   b) The current equity adjustment, which recognizes sparse population as well as assessment base, is ineffective in some jurisdictions in providing sufficient funds to compensate for the losses experienced by reduced numbers of pupils

   c) Boards are politically impotent to close small schools where the pupil count is so low that grants received do not carry the basic costs of keeping them open. In practice, they stay open, driving the local mill rate unnecessarily high, and taking funds from the larger schools to subsidize the small schools

   d) The current provincial emphasis upon keeping the family farm viable through agricultural incentives is viewed as being incomplete when the educational opportunities being made available to farm children are gradually being reduced. Many farm family members interviewed indicated that a significant movement from farms to towns and cities, and toward private schools is occurring out of frustration with the decreasing educational opportunities that are available in small communities

2. That the principles upon which the investigation of funding of rural education is based include the following:

   a) Provincial funding should not be provided for unnecessary, uneconomic schools when equivalent or more suitable programs can be provided nearby

b) The components of accepted, approved, viable educational programs at each instructional level and in schools of various sizes should be determined

c) Viable educational programs should be made available within a reasonable busing distance of every farm home

d) The quality of education being provided in schools should be considered before determining which schools, if any, should close

e) Decisions about school closure may, by board motion, public petition, or Provincial directive, be transferred to a Provincial agency, in structure and function similar to the ERCB, or the Surface Rights Board. Each of these agencies fulfills functions that could be assigned to municipal councils, but because of the need for provincial uniformity, they have been transferred to a single, independent agency. It has been suggested in our study area that such an arrangement may assist boards to operate only those schools that offer a viable academic program and are economically feasible

One scenario incorporating these principles might be as follows:

Alberta Education would have to determine standards defining acceptable, viable programs for rural elementary, junior high, and high schools. These would probably be prepared in consultation with representatives of the various stakeholder groups. These would be published as the minimal educational standard that would be expected in all schools in the province. The Equal Education Access Authority would then be created, composed of a chairman and board members representing the stakeholders, and whose mandate would be to assure that all children in the province were receiving at least the accepted standard programs. It would receive and review the school and system evaluation reports submitted in compliance with the MFP. If a board presented a motion, if a significant number of residents of an area petitioned, or if Alberta Education directed the EEAA to do so, the EEAA would assume the responsibility to determine which schools in the

area should provide the standard program. It would go into the communities, conduct formal hearings, summon witnesses, and decide in which communities there would be provincial financial support for the basic, approved programs. Among many criteria which it would develop, it would consider distance students must travel to school and adequacy of staff and school programs as determinants of approved school status. For approved schools, grants would be made available to fund the entire program, irrespective of pupil counts. The jurisdiction would receive no financial support for its unapproved schools but would be free to use all or a portion of the funds derived from the supplementary requisition to enhance the standard programs in approved schools, or to keep certain of the unapproved schools open. If at a later date the board decided to close a small, unapproved school, residents could appeal to the EEAA for a review of the status of the school. If the EEAA approved, the school would be funded on a program basis. If it did not, the local board could proceed with the closure.

There are a number of issues associated with such a proposal. To some degree, it retains local autonomy, but permits the board, the residents, or in problem situations, Alberta Education to limit local determination of issues. It would seem to permit more consideration of the educational interests of children from a provincial and social perspective than perhaps is prevalent now. It would help to assure that funds are expended only on programs that are viable. It would provide a support mechanism that is currently missing for keeping essential school services viable in locations where further centralization is impractical, and would prevent the erosion of quality of programs in many schools that now are losing the support of their communities.

It will be opposed by many who want to retain a local school in each small community at all costs, and by people who are convinced that local determination of local issues is a right upon which government action should never infringe. Accepting these arguments may limit the educational and lifetime accomplishments of many rural Alberta children unless other means are found to make

educational opportunities in small rural communities the equivalent of those being offered elsewhere in the province.

It is suggested that a program such as that outlined above be implemented more through redistribution of funds than by an extraordinary infusion of additional grants. The needed educational benefits should be within economic reason when the costly, duplicate, minimal programs are taken out of the government support structures. If they are to continue, and many may, that will be a local decision, to be funded locally.

3. That greater flexibility in expending available funds with appropriate accountability under legislation and regulations be permitted.

C. For action by boards;

1. That a concentrated in-service program be organized within each school jurisdiction to assist teachers and those who facilitate their work to understand and practice teaching methods that focus classroom work upon student learning and less on teaching lessons, subjects, grades or classes

2. That trustees improve their performance by placing greater emphasis upon facilitating the activities of administrators, managers, teachers, and improving their relationships with the public and with teachers. Improved teacher recognition brings improved teacher performance and morale

3. That student transportation systems be streamlined by limiting the time spent on buses to a minimum -- less than one hour morning and night is preferred

4. That to the degree that it is possible, the public schools accommodate the values espoused by supporters of private schools, including those who advocate home education

5. That greater emphasis be placed on providing quality educational programs in the primary grades

D. For action by administrators;

1. That leadership be given to teachers and parents in facilitating the learning activities of children

2. That improvement of teaching and the teaching force be implemented by renewing emphasis upon recruiting, selecting, training, assigning, orienting, supervising and providing quality in-service activities for all teachers; evaluating, rewarding, and retaining particularly competent teachers; and identifying and transferring, rotating the assignments of and/or dismissing teachers who are not suited to their current assignments. Public, parent and student input into staff evaluation and improvement activities should be explored

3. That communication mechanisms and channels be kept open between and among all parties

4. That improvements be effected in language arts skills through program and staff competency enhancement

5. That timetabling practices be improved to give students access to the courses they need

6. That more adequate acquisition and assignment of specialty space be pursued so that specialty courses can be offered by qualified staff in appropriate classrooms

7. That schools meet the special needs of students, including career and personal counselling by qualified individuals

E. For action by teachers;

1. That teachers increase their understanding and place greater emphasis upon the nature of learning, upon the relationship between student learning and the role of the teacher, and upon making schools pleasant places in which to learn

2. That concentrated attention be given to student motivation, learning styles, discipline, instructional programs, career selection, life skills training, and preparation for post-secondary training and employment

3. That reporting of student progress and communication of school matters meet the expectations of parents

F. For action by parents and community members;

1. That parents and community members offer greater support, partnership, involvement and participation in all aspects of the schools. This can be accomplished as interested people avail themselves of the information in board reports. They will be better informed as they participate in board meetings and budgetary deliberations. They should seek ongoing access to teachers, classrooms and facilities

5.5 CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The number of issues and recommendations identified in this project should not be interpreted to imply that the three school systems are in any way offering an inferior education. In fact, many excellent schools, programs and instructional teams are providing students with an excellent education. However, improvement can still be made, and the issues that have now been identified and the recommendations made are presented to assist educators to make good educational systems even better.

Improvement occurs when people have a vision of what can and should be accomplished, when they have a measure of where things now stand, when they have planned and developed appropriate programs to move them from where they are to where their vision suggests they should go, and when those programs have been implemented.

This project has assisted participants to begin this process of system improvement. The vision of some 1850 people is clearly portrayed in the priorities that are reported above. The rank ordered priorities that are reported constitute a measure of need as perceived by particular interest groups. From these statements of vision and priority, boards now are participating with their communities in developing the programs, which when implemented, promise to start the system-improvement processes that local people have said are needed.

Embodied within the priority issues raised, and the recommendations generated are responses to each of the general and specific objectives that were specified for the project. These objectives reflect the vision for system improvement that was anticipated as the project was planned. Most of the objectives are addressed directly, but some of the specific ones will be considered in more depth as the program generation and implementation phases resulting from the project are pursued.

The most important activity that now should be taken is to translate the vision and measures provided by the project into action. It will be noted that many of the recommendations can be implemented with little or no increase in funding. Some adjustments in priorities may be needed, but by making relatively small changes, a number of early improvements can be anticipated.

It is our considered judgment that providing a creative in-service program in the areas of leadership, management, (including school and classroom management) and instructional processes that concentrate instructor and teacher aide attention more toward facilitating student learning than upon the teaching act should be the first action taken in response to the priorities generated in this project. In our view, successful activity in this area carries the promise of doing more toward focussing board, staff and parent attention upon the critical interna of education than any other action that could be taken. The benefits to children should be substantial.

Our final comment is to express our appreciation to all who participated in the project. The cooperation of the steering committees, the boards and of every participant was essential in carrying the project forward. The quality of participation was excellent -- people were open and honest in communicating their perceptions of what should be occurring in the schools. It is evident that people are interested in quality education and are willing to work with their elected boards to maintain and improve educational opportunities for their children. We are hopeful that the followup activities that now are planned will effect the changes that are required to enable each group to meet more adequately the expectations of the others.

6.0 APPENDIX A: Report Documents, one for each county

The appropriate volume of Appendix A, the computer-produced reporting document was delivered to each steering committee in their final meeting in Lethbridge on June 23, 1986. These reporting documents contain the SEV's for each item and for each of the groups analyzed. A sheet of instructions appears at the beginning of each document which gives the reader the necessary information to determine the rank ordered priorities of all of the items for each group. When remedial action has resolved the issues reported above, there may an interest in determining the next level of priority. This can be done by referring to the material contained in Appendix A.